WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1   1.   A method of collecting an electronic signature for an electronic

2   record stored in a database, the method comprising:

3   automatically creating an electronic record from data stored in a

4   plurality of different database tables in response to the occurrence of a predetermined

5   event;

6   storing an instance of the electronic record in a common repository of

7   electronic records that provides an audit trail that cannot be altered or disabled by users

8   of the system;

9   executing a rule associated with the electronic record to determine

10   whether an electronic signature is required to connote review and/or approval of the

11   electronic record; and

12   if execution of the rule results in a determination that an electronic

13   signature is required, marking the instance of the electronic record as unsigned and

14   initiating a request to collect the required electronic signature.

1   2.   The method of claim 1 further comprising receiving an electronic

2   signature from the user; verifying the electronic signature; and in response to a positive

3   verification of the electronic signature, marking the electronic record as signed.

1   3.   The method of claim 2 wherein the electronic record is stored in

2   a common repository of electronic records that provides an audit trail that cannot be

3   altered or disabled by users of the database.

1   4.   The method of claim 1 wherein the electronic record comprises

2   unstructured data in a character large object (CLOB) format.

1   5.   The method of claim 3 wherein the unstructured data comprises a

2   well-formed XML document stored within a column of a table stored in the database.

1   6.   The method of claim 4 wherein fields of the electronic record are

2   filled with XML data based on a predefined mapping to multiple data sources.

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1   7.   The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of, if

2   execution of the rule results in a determination that an electronic signature is required,

3   displaying data from the electronic record on a computer display.

1   8.   The method of claim 7 wherein data from the electronic record is

2   display according to a predefined layout set forth in an XSL style sheet.

1   9.   The method of claim 1 wherein the rule requires a plurality of

2   different electronic signatures and wherein, if execution of the rule results in a

3   determination that a plurality of electronic signatures are required, requesting the

4   plurality of electronic signatures.

1   10.   The method of claim 1 wherein the electronic record is initially

2   marked as unsigned by setting an appropriate attribute associated with a database table

3   in which at least part of the record is stored.

1   11.   A computer system that manages electronic records stored in a

2   database, the computer system comprising:

3   a processor;

4   a database; and

5   a computer-readable memory coupled to the processor, the

6   computer-readable memory configured to store a computer program;

7   wherein the processor is operative with the computer program to:

8   (i) automatically create an electronic record from data stored in

9   a plurality of different database tables in response to the occurrence of a

10 predetermined event;

11   (ii) store an instance of the electronic record in a common

12 repository of electronic records that provides an audit trail that cannot be altered

13 or disabled by users of the system;

14   (iii) execute a rule associated with the electronic record to

15 determine whether an electronic signature is required to connote review and/or

16 approval of the electronic record; and

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17   (iv) mark the instance of the electronic record as unsigned and

18   initiate a request to collect the required electronic signature if execution of the

19   rule results in a determination that an electronic signature is required.

1   12.   The computer system of claim 11 wherein the electronic record

2 is stored in a common repository of electronic records that provides an audit trail that

3 cannot be altered or disabled by users of the system.

1   13.   The computer system of claim 12 wherein the electronic record

2 comprises unstructured data in a character large object (CLOB) format.

1   14.   The computer system of claim 13 wherein the unstructured data

2 comprises a well-formed XML document stored within a column of a table stored in the

3 database.

1   15.   The computer system of claim 14 wherein fields of the electronic

2 record are filled with XML data based on a predefined mapping to multiple data

3 sources.

1   16.   The computer system of claim 11 wherein the processor and

2 computer program are further operative to obtain and verify the electronic signature,

3 and thereafter, mark the electronic record as signed.

1   17.   The method of claim 16 wherein the processor and computer

2 program are further operative to initially mark the electronic record as unsigned by

3 setting an appropriate attribute associated with a database table in which at least part of

4 the record is stored.

1   18.   A computer program stored on a computer-readable storage

2 medium for managing electronic records stored in a database, the computer program

3 comprising:

4   code for automatically creating an electronic record from data stored in a

5 plurality of different database tables in response to the occurrence of a predetermined

6 event;

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7   code for storing an instance of the electronic record in a common

8 repository of electronic records that provides an audit trail that cannot be altered or

9 disabled by users of the system;

10   code for executing a rule associated with the electronic record to

11 determine whether an electronic signature is required to connote review and/or

12 approval of the electronic record; and

13   code for marking the instance of the electronic record as unsigned and

14 initiating a request to collect the required electronic signature if execution of the rule

15 results in a determination that an electronic signature is required.

1   19. The computer program of claim 18 wherein the electronic record

2 is stored in a common repository of electronic records that provides an audit trail that

3 cannot be altered or disabled by users of the system.

1   20. The computer program of claim 19 wherein the electronic record

2 comprises unstructured data in a character large object (CLOB) format.

1   21. The computer program of claim 20 wherein the unstructured data

2 comprises a well-formed XML document stored within a column of a table stored in the

3 database.

1   22. The computer program of claim 21 wherein fields of the

2 electronic record are filled with XML data based on a predefined mapping to multiple

3 data sources.

1   23. The computer program of claim 18 wherein the computer

2 program further comprises code for obtaining and verifying the electronic signature,

3 and thereafter, marking the electronic record as signed.

1   24. The method of program 23 wherein the computer program

2 further comprises code for initially marking the electronic record as unsigned by setting

3 an appropriate attribute associated with a database table in which at least part of the

4 record is stored.

1   25. A method of collecting an electronic signature for an electronic

2 record stored in a database, the method comprising:

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3   automatically creating an electronic record in response to the occurrence

4   of a predetermined event, wherein the electronic record comprises unstructured, well-

5   formed XML data stored in a character large-object (CLOB) format;

6   storing an instance of the electronic record in a common repository of

7   electronic records that provides an audit trail that cannot be altered or disabled by users

8   of the system;

9   executing a rule associated with the electronic record to determine

10   whether an electronic signature is required to connote review and/or approval of the

11   electronic record; and

12   if execution of the rule results in a determination that an electronic

13   signature is required, marking the instance of the electronic record as unsigned;

14   requesting the electronic signature;

15   after obtaining the electronic signature, verifying its authenticity; and

16   if the electronic signature is verified as authentic, marking the electronic

17   record as signed.

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